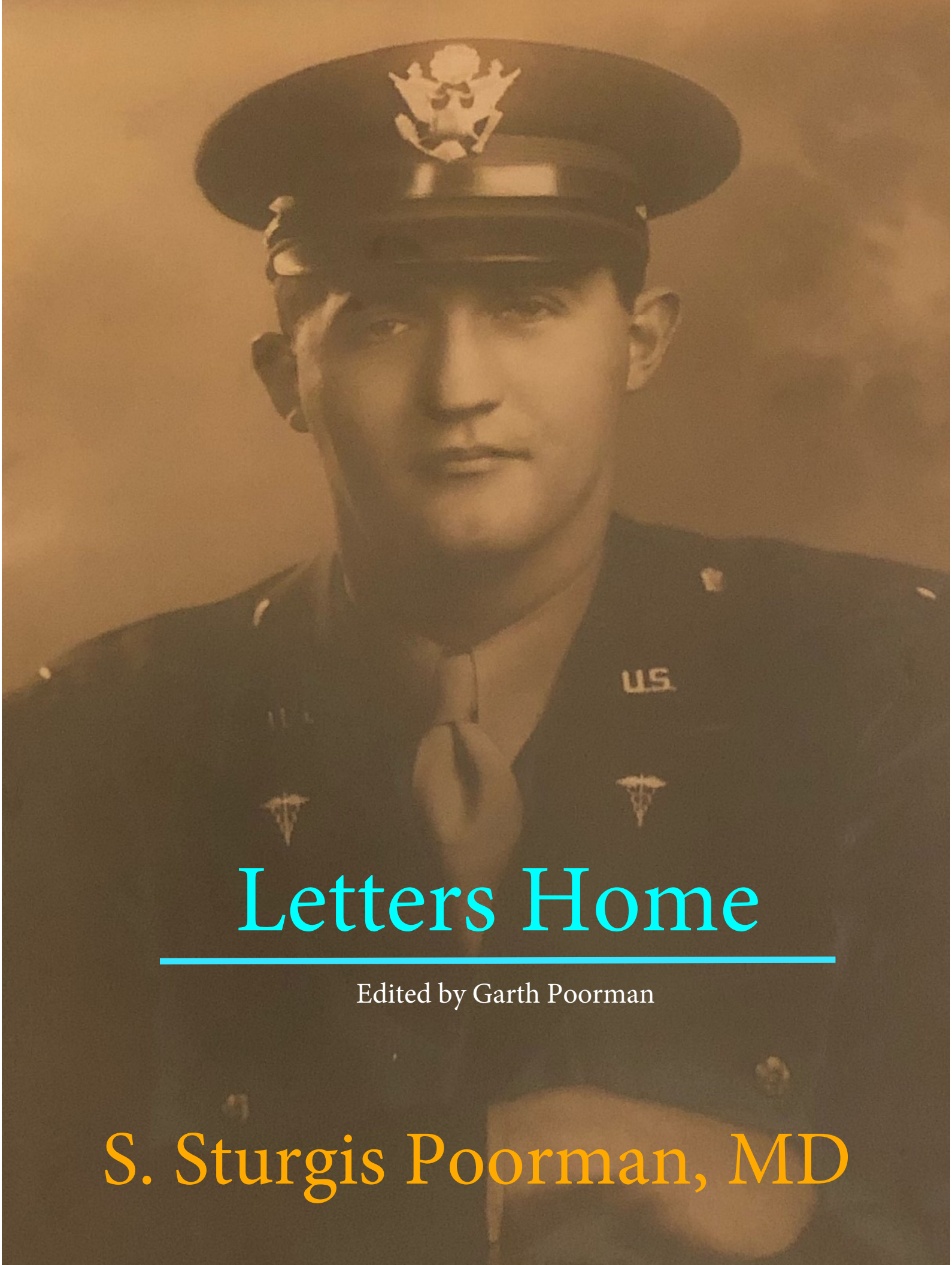

Letters Home

Edited by Garth Poorman

S. Sturgis Poorman, MD

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Sturgis Poorman, MD (1915-1998) was my grandfather. This is a collection of letters he wrote in 1945 from Belgium, France, Holland, and Germany in the final months of WWII. Most are written to his mother, Mary Sturgis Poorman (1886-1966), except for a couple to his younger sister, Julia Poorman (1918-1992). He doubtlessly wrote many more, but not all arrived, and most of the rest haven't survived the intervening eight decades. That any still exist is a minor miracle. It attests to the fact that these letters were precious to his mother. She took pains to preserve them. Thankfully, they have remained in old family boxes since her death in 1966.

I don't want to infect these primary sources with historical anachronisms or current-day observations. I am not a product of that era, so I won't try to shape anyone's understanding other than to lay out to the barest of background information needed to enjoy them.

My grandfather graduated medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in the Spring of 1941 (he references his graduation day in one of his letters to Julia). He then went to Reading Hospital (PA) as a resident physician. That December, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States entered the war.

In August 1942, he enlisted in the Army and was stationed at Camp Campbell in southern Kentucky. He met my grandmother, Christine "Chris" Freeland (1920-2008), a nursing student, in April of 1943 while on a weekend pass to Nashville. Exactly a year later, they married. As with lots of men getting married before heading off to uncertain fates, they didn't have long to settle into marriage. In November 1944, he was shipped off to England with the 375th Medical Battalion, attached to the 75th Infantry Division. Chris, newly pregnant with my father, moved in with family outside of Nashville and waited for his return.

His medical battalion first bivouacked in England, then deployed into France and Belgium around the time of the Battle of the Bulge. With the rest of the US Forces, the 75th Division then pushed into Germany and across the Rhine as the Allies got closer to victory. The first letter in this chronological collection is from late January 1945 in Belgium.

A few people are referenced in his letters. His father, who he calls "Pop", was John Henry Poorman (1884-1975). His older sister, Mary Jean Jensen (1914-1986), is referred to as "MJ". When he writes about "Grandmother" he is referencing his maternal grandmother, Julia Vautier Sturgis (1857-1948), who was living with the family. "Edna" is his father's sister, Edna Poorman (1887-1949). "Clifford" was his mother's younger brother, Clifford Sturgis (1898-1975). Otto and Fritzie were his beloved dogs, both dachshunds. "Home" is the family house at 221 Price Avenue, Narberth, PA.

Sturgis was 27 years old when he wrote these letters to his mother. As it always is from the vantage point of the present moment, everything that lay ahead was uncertain. The world was still at war …

UNITED STATES ARMY

Western Front, Belgium
21 Jan

Dear Mother,

Another Sunday, got another of your valentines and cards today - mailed Jan 5 - pretty good time - Glad you at last know where we are in general -

It's still snowing - which really makes it tough on the foot soldiers.

Got two letters from Chris today written on Jan 5 - she had gotten one of mine of Dec 27 -

Hope the old homestead is not too cold these days - otherwise the poor dogs.

Thinking of all of you tonight over here in Belgium

Love
Stevens

Belgium "On the Western Front"
22 Jan

Dear Mother,

Got a letter today written by you back in Mar 21. Was glad to get it though - Any promotion hasn't come thru yet and it has made me wonder - but that's doesn't matter I guess - Things look good over here - even in this cold weather -

Tell Julie one of the boys picked up a stuffed dog - Tell otto & Fritzie they would look better though. -

Guess Edna is doing well now - remember me to her -

Say hello to Mrs & Carl
Julie and last but not
least Pop -
Does Pop still have
to feed the dogs -?
Love Stuy

15 Feb 44 France

Dear Mother,

Enjoyed the pictures you sent, they sure make me homesick. Yes I got your Cablegram you sent us Dec - it took about as long as V mail did at that time. Your Carmels Came about the middle of January Yes. I frequently use your magnifying glass which you sent me.

On the mail again so don't expect to get letters frequently.

I ought I was glad to get your letter written on Feb 2 - 5. I have much the feeling you have. This mentions about a bath that was back the first week in Jan. -

all that I page

letters she claims to write
as at the most four -
- I guess she is a little
jealous that I think so much
of you and the rest -
Perhaps she doesn't like
it that I never mention
and rave as she does about
the future life with her
and the baby. I told her
how I felt about it before
I left and said I wouldn't
mention it again - Perhaps
she still doesn't recognize
that I don't change easily -
As for writing her people,
I wrote one V mail as
part of her to her mother -
I have written quite a few
more, many of which have
not gotten there -
As to thinking I will
be home by June or July

that is foolishness — and just her day dreams.

One reason I didn't particularly want her to have a baby while I was over seas was so I wouldn't have to listen to all the details of it via letter — Perhaps an experience two years ago has left a deep impression on my mind — However it doesn't bother me —

I agree with you at 59 this couldn't work like you — Because she wouldn't — I'll laugh of all of this — Keep writing I enjoy your letters —

Perhaps I should write love letters, those mushy ones, but I never did and I don't intend to now —

All of what I have written is between you and me and the lamp post

so we will leave it there.
I do not worry about this -
She is young and going
thru what millions of women
do every - year — I am
more concerned with
your condition and that
you stop work -
As for the money - that
is yours and is not needed
by anyone else - Love Stump

Dear Julie
Have enjoyed your
letters —

France
16 Feb 45 -

Dear Jake
Have enjoyed your letters
and E mail very much.
Outside of mother, you and
Chick run a race for the
most letters — with Fritzo
& Otto nosing out M. J -
Any pictures of what
all of you have been doing
since I left is quite
complete - Those pictures
you sent were very good
and I am keeping them
where they will not get
lost.
Saw a dachshund
last night looked just
like Otto only his legs
were a little more bowed
(no reflection on Otto).
In the town I am in

they have a woman teacher
who shares your
I have been living in a
house with an elderly woman
who speaks perfect English
since she was a school
teacher in England for 20
years - By the way she
is a Quaker — there
are about a 100 in Israel —
and has heard Ruben
Jones speak.
Keep writing even
though sometimes you
get no answer
Love
Stuyc

23 Feb - Holland

Dear Mother, Wrote you once today but the mail had all ready gone. Well I guess my days as company Commander are almost Over. You see when my promotion went in, army sent a string major down to division instead of giving me my promotion - Sort of expected something like that to happen but well that's the army - you are never rewarded on merits, it just the breaks - + being in the right spot at the right time. I have often thought this might happen ever since I got the company. It makes me mad though to have had it within reach and yet to be denied - I long ago made up my mind when it happened, I would and am consoling myself with

the picture that might have been if I had gone to the South Pacific with the other outfit - So even then I am fortunate. I will still be with the Cleaver station now which is better than up front as battalion surgeon - but I

disappointed you, but I have learned to take disappointments in life - things I have usually gotten what I started out for. Yes I am a little low today! but not for long it brings me out of this attitude back to army thoughts of being a civilian - I don't worry it won't get me down - its nothing compared with other things which I have experienced in my life.

Thought I would let you know through just how I felt -

Life goes merrily along in the States. Chris writes me she went to the doctor on 10 Feb. and she had gained 8 lbs in a month. I told her when she left — she sure had better watch her weight. Personally I think if she walked & did more exercise it would be better for her. On 13 Feb she wrote she was doing some running but couldn't continue because it was too hard to get to. I wonder what Chris thinks about our post war plans. We had discussed them during the last weeks I was in the States — Perhaps I was somewhat overhauled by the "motherhood angle" but it did and was discussed — She knew I was going to practice in Pa — I also felt that I couldn't come right out of the army

and be a good civilian doctor without at least some months refresher in a medical school which to do it. I kill of right provided - perhaps I should have thought of those things before I got married last April - Maybe I did -

Anyway she seems to expect - perhaps rightly - that I come right back & set up a home & live as if no war had intervened - & that is what I want - what I need - I was such a disappointment to me when she became pregnant - she could have been some help to me when I came back - other than as a wife - well I guess that's enough for today -

Hope I don't seem too moody - really am not just lonesome for you and home -

all my love

Stevie

Sunday - Holland (2)
25 Feb

Dear Mother,

Just two months ago it was Christmas — we have gone many places since then — the bulge in Belgium and the Colmar pocket in France — now its Holland. It has been interesting to read in the Bulletin — third of 19, 20, 21, 22 Dec — what they were reporting about the bulge — Past few days have gotten about 10 papers — and even though they are old enjoy reading them.

Had your card — letter of Feb 15 written + mailed at Rayborough yesterday — I am so sorry ~~you~~ my letters to you

have taken so long - 2
I got one letter you wrote
Jan 20-21 - yesterday -
In it you mention that
Chris Family - don't ever
think I ever stop to
think about them - what
you said - was purely
in Chris' mind what she
would like you to think -
Personally I think she
like any wife - would be
a jealous that I think
so much of all you at
home & particularly you -
I have never written
a letter that I didn't write
two at the same time - If
one gets lost in the mail -
that's why its seems unequal
I can say that your
letters to me have out numbered
anyone else by 2 to 1.

Would you like me to send Cablegrams every week; they are expensive! I have not for fear they might worry you - just let me know.

Hope grandmother is feeling better - I guess this week will be over last to work - I hope so -

What goes on here - nothing new - guess the major will take over as Intendat - The colonel told me today my promotion had been sent back in & I still might get it - seems like a 100 to 1 shot to me -

Our division has won praise for what it has done so far both in Belgium & in the South part of Holland front

This week we have been set up in a new wrecked school. In a small Dutch town — a large church stands nearly which is in complete ruins —

The weather still is cool but not the bitter cold of January. I don't remember January as cold as in Belgium in the Ardennes —

Here what I care to wear — Been issued underwear, 2 pairs woolen underwear, top & bottom, a small sleeveless sweater, a wool shirt, a sweater, a combat jacket (like field jacket) beside my raincoat overcoat — still I was quite chilled up. About nothing however could keep the feet warm.

Just - the January letter from the First Church today

Right now I am looking (5)
at the picture you sent me
a week or so ago. It
sure brings me back home —
The mock-orange tree — with
the grape-arbor. The back
cellar-door with Fritzes at
it. The old-spruce
~~to~~ tree in the front yard —
Pop in his winter attire —
all so very nice — yet
so far away —
Send me a few more
of them when you get two
I think they all came out
very well.
well mother dear
well close —
Love —
Your Son
Waiting ~~to~~ return —

A Message to Julia

Dear Julia —
Guess I need Pop
over here to speak

to these Dutch — its
hard to make ones self (6)
understood. —

How do you like
the longer days now —
isn't it better — don't
have to go to work in the
dark —

Guess you have had
quite a time keeping up with
our fast moving Division —
for that matter we have too.

Guess the home has been
cold this winter — From all
reports the winter reminds me
of the one when I was
a sophomore at college —
I remember — I had chaps
on the chem (want old then)
for the whole month of
January. Wish you
remember some of those ice

we use to take in the old Chevy. It certainly brings back fond memories to me. The day we got it — remember — how it heated up going up to grandmothers — How jealous Angie was of it — How much I wanted a radio for it & finally got one —

One of its last big trips was its trip over to the World's Fair — it was Broadway that was back in Oct. 1940 — It sure ran well that day —

Remember my graduation day from medical school it broke down there at 52nd St. and had to be towed home — almost as if it knew it job was almost done —

Sounds like I am sentimental perhaps so —

Have you ever heard (8)
from any your classmates
at Bryn Mawr. — What
ever happened to Vi Vi — Did
Johnnie ever get married?
Say the clipping about
Betty Tafft's husband —
How is the present
crop of movies. I have
been noticing their titles
in the Bulletin — some
sound good —
Your V mail &
mother is very plain —
Right now our mail is
beating V mail by about
a week. It hard to
explain —
Say hello to Pop
& Mr T — Love
Yes mother & Stevenson
got two dozen valentines all from you, Julie
Pete, Mart & Chris

29 March - Henry
Good Friday

Dear Mother, Got your nice cards yesterday, a letter of 13 March & one from Nit & a V. mail from Edna.

I wonder if this big pud here has piled up my letters getting home - I have written every day - so they probably will come in sometime.

I enjoyed yours & M. J letters - In regards the one letter - I think I wrote about that before. It's yours to do with it what you please - and no one else has anything to say about it.

Enclosed find a four-leaf clover I found today in a field where we have our tents set up.

I am glad grandmother got my letter. Shall

try to write her again.
I read in M.J.'s letter she is still having gas troubles.

The leaves are just coming out on the trees here but most of the spring flowers are out. It certainly would be a nice Easter - yes if I were home going to Communion with the family at First Church - I will be there though in Spirit - Love

Your Son
Stuart

31 March 45 Germany

Dear Mother, Today I received your letter mailed 25 March - just 6 days ago - it was written just last Saturday - Also got your V mails written 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 of July - Mail has come in well for me but I gather from your letters nothing from me - I have written every day - I guess they all got going mail held up this big Push, during - Sorry to hear Pearl is so bad - Poor Clifford sure has his troubles - I hope you have guessed where I am now from your Office in the Staff - Building - Things look good over here - but we keep our fingers crossed - See in Stars + Stripes you will have a nice warm Easter - Spring they say has really come early back home

Well if I were home tonight I would be bringing you a nice Easter lily home - and we would be thinking of going to first Church in the morning.

Got a letter from Chris today telling about her sister being sick - The doctor says she has a possible peptic ulcer - Chris seems well - I guess a little nervous as they all get in the last 3rd of pregnancy.

Well Mother
Julie
Pop
M.J.
Gertie
Otto -

HS EASTER. 45

Lets Hope we all will be together in 46

Thanks - again for all the Cards -

Love

2 April 45 Germany

Dear Mother, So glad to get your letters of 9, 19 and Julie of 26 along with the picture of the Bulletin. I liked those two long letters you wrote to me.

Well we can now say we are across the Rhine and with the 9th Army. as you can see by the enclosed newspaper clipping in yesterday "Stars and Stripe".

Yesterday got two Bulletins of 5, 6 March which is good time for newspapers.

Saw in one of the Bulletins of last month a little note that Dr. Margit Stern took care of Cornelia Otis Skinner - I wonder if you saw it.

Found a large new Nazi flag which I am going to send home for you to keep as a souvenir.

Yesterday Easter we were on the move and it's the first Easter I can remember I didn't get to church.

I don't see why Angie can't help out in taking care of Grandmother. It sure has been a long pull for you.

As regards Chris - I got another letter from her today - says she is getting so large now she didn't go to church. I tell her nothing about what you write just tell her I get my letters regularly from home. I am thoroughly in accord with your letter you wrote on 9 March - so think no more of it. Last month I order some flowers for Chris on our wedding anniversary on 15 April and for you on Mothers day just thought I would let you know in case they don't come.

Things are pretty good with me - just hoping for the whole thing to be over soon.

Love
Stan

①

3 April 45 Germany.

Dear Mother, was glad to get M.J. letters today — one mailed on 9 March & the other on the 28th — boy that's quick time — 6 days — The pictures are excellent of the boys & the clock. Hope you have gotten some of my recent letters.

We have been busy in spells — but mostly busy moving.

We have been having April showers off and on today.

Have picked up a number of pictures of the towns I have been in but cant send them home yet yet. Have also picked up a large Nazi flag — which I want to send home as a souvinier.

Hope things are easier for you at home. The leaves should be out on the trees at home now — in several days they will be out here.

Whatever unit here

is. Clear weather so the aircraps can do their bit.

This paper - is Germ paper - got quite a bit of Germ paper - notas good as ours but will do -

Had two letters from Chris today - written 22, & 26 - which also is good time - She seems in good spirits and writes the usual -

Also got a letter from her younger brother & Hugo she must

have told him to write me -

We all wonder when this will be over here and then what -

Should know in about 2 weeks just how long it will last -

Remember me to grandmother I hope she can get out this spring -

Tell Julie I enjoy her letters & thank her for the Pony editions of the Bulletin

⑤ all over the parts of Germany you move you see people that the Germans brought in from their conquered lands. From appearances the Germans were living pretty well - but were taking an awful beating from our air corps. Many of their towns have been destroyed and looked as those did in Belgium - Germany itself is a nice country for scenery — with almost all the land under cultivation

(6) Hope Pop is keeping well and is not too perched in the office — I don't see how you have been able to do anything in the office just with Edna over with grandmother for so long a time —

Well guess I must close. Right now we are in a nice German hospital — a relief — for a bit

Love
Stan

6 April 45 Somewhere in Germany with 9th Army

Dear Mother

Nothing new today - Last night I saw a movie, "A Song to Remember", the projector broke down at least two dozen times.

Getting along alright in the company - hope everything is going well at home.

Enclosed is a clipping from last night Stars & Stripes - guess we have probably been mentioned in the papers back home.

Re-read your letters I received yesterday since I received some old mail today.

I guess you know the action of the Western Front as well as I do. It will be interesting to show you when I get home.

It too bad there will not be a definite V-E day - so the civilians back home can have a similar time like they had when I - Remember I guess you do - you were so sick.

7 April 45 Germany - East of the Rhine

Dear Mother, It's a cool April day today. Sun was out all day but it still was cool. Probably more tomorrow - since it's Sunday. Plenty of hard fighting down there yet.

Just read 2 April pony edition of newsweek; that's the quickest we have ever gotten a magazine from the states. It was good to read almost up to date current events.

Didn't like the article in it though which told how few of us would see home before going to the Pacific. No letters today - that makes two days straight; should get some mail soon I'd think. Had any of that for almost a week - But enough about me. I am well, not working too hard here in the cleaning company - We got 6 cokes per person last night and mine are gone right now.

I have quite a collection of money in my wallet English, French, Belgian, Dutch and German currency. German money is quite easy; One mark the U.S. [illegible]

retail a value of 10 American cents
(the Nazis claimed it was worth 40)—
so 10 mark = 1 dollar —
Dutch currency is so easy
One gulden = 40 and each gulden
has 100 cents —
France and Belgium have francs with
both of them worth about 2 cent a
piece per franc —
The British currency I think
was the hardest to learn — so
it seemed — then — and it seems a
long time ago that we were back
in Wales — England and Wales
seemed more picturesque and old
that France, Belgium or Germany &
France + Belgium except in large cities
seemed like one manure pile after
another. according to what they
told me — the larger the pile — the better
it showed how many cows you had
and it was easier to marry off one's
eligible daughter. I can't see how
they stand it in the summer time though
with the smell and flies.

The Rhineland is not
too impressive; Reminds one of
the industrial part of N. J. near
New York state. One thing

almost every available field is cultivated.

The towns and cities are modern with facilities to bathe — That's one thing you can't find in England or Wales - facilities to bathe. I don't think they take baths in the winter time — Come the Spring don't either, they just use perfume.

While in Holland got the same thing in Wales - all the local girls seem crazy about getting an American soldier to marry them and take them back to America. all they know about America is what they see in the movies and they picture America as a land of plenty etc (Hollywood stuff) If they only knew - But I read 30,000 English brides are waiting to go to America.

Well enuf of my rambling for today — Saw where Eastern Pilots were $1.50 a bloom this year but have - due to shortage of heels —

Love to all —

Your son
Stanley

8 April 45

Germany
9th Army

Dear Mother, It's a cold April day today - very windy and foggy. Yet another Sunday has rolled around - but all the days seem alike over here - It will be 5 months next Friday since I last saw all of you and didn't get a chance to say goodbye the night I could see all the Pines in the springtime with the Crab Apple tree in bloom.

Hope things have leveled up at the office and Grandmother's better.

Keep writing I enjoy your letters -

Must go now. Just found out we are going to move

Love

Shugs

13 April - 45 - Card in the money - Germany

Dear Mother, Just heard the news about the President's death - it was midnight here when we heard it from London - Certainly will alter history.

Got several of your nice letters today written Good Friday. And the next day - also your Card of 4 April - Sell Jake & Pop & like your letters the way they are.

Well wait be long now before - the song about marching down the Streets of Berlin - I think - that is true - a holiday making week - Notice the date - today -

Have been very busy today - my feet hurt me like they did when I was an intern - Still in our large school house. Had a shower today - felt good -

Love to all

L. L. Todman Cpl

15 June 45 –

Dear Mother, Well we had a nice but rough trip across the Channel and my way back from Lewk. It was quite cool on the boat and the weather felt like March or April. – It seems queer to be wearing all your woolen clothes this time of the year. It nice sleeping anyway – to be sleeping under blankets.

Wrote grandmother several cards & a letter from London. I hope she gets them –

Guess there will be a lot a news waiting for me when I get back to my outfit – which should be in a couple of days – Also will be interested in what is going to happen to my outfit –

Hope you are not working too hard – Remember how

steaming hot Pluden used to
become - at this time of the year.
which reminds me - I
had plenty of clothes and
ice cream while we were in
London =
well getting ready to
leave the boat so I will close
Love
Stanyo

29 June 45 assembly area - Rheims

Dear Mother, Haven't received any letters from you since the 18th - guess they are getting all tied up somewhere. It's a all day rain here & rather cold.

Well after the big news the other night when I got the Cablegram it stating me thinking of all you and Pop have done for me since that day back in Dec 1915 when I was born. I just hope Chris and I can give our son the same opportunities you gave me.

Guess Chris should be leaving the hospital soon - Should get some letters today.

The little brown dachshund we have here certainly is cute. takes me back 8 years ago to when Fritzie was a Pup - he seems to have all the ways Fritzie had - including his bad ways.

well ask. Aunt Julie how she likes to have a nephew— You sure have him well dressed.

well must go now—

all my love

Strugis

22-August France
Evening

Dear Mother, Got your V mails of 15th and 16th as well as three from Jule of same date. Wish the drawing celebrating V-J Day.

Yours grandmother is getting quite feeble - as you mentioned in your letter -

Hope you are feeling better now -

Today - that is tonight I saw the movie "Salome - - - It was pretty good - for a change.

No news yet of our division going anywhere - I guess now since peace with the Jap - which may be good or bad depending what they decide to do with them in the next month. If they continue A.A.C. it looks like we stay until after new year - If not we may be home by Christmas

Let's hope its that way.

Wrote you a card this morning told you Chris had to stop nursing the baby because of an inflamation in her breast — gums she was a little sick for a day or two — Her checkup & the babies were — normal — weight — over 10 lbs now — must be gaining

well these next few months while I am waiting will give me time to think and plan for the future — which won't be too far away now. It won't be easy — but this army wait too easy, either.

Tell Julie I enjoy her V mails & letters — That was a very appropriate ride to take on V-J day — up to Valley Forge. Am waiting patiently for the day I also can go up there

Love
Stan

P.S. — there are old envelopes I am using, so don't think someone opened your letter

27 Oct 1945 Camp Pittsburgh France

Dear Mother Just waiting now until next Tuesday when we move out to Marville.

Went into Rhims (about 20 miles from here) to see a football game this afternoon. It was an ideal day for a football game.

Sure miss getting the mail, guess that last one marked on 19th will have to do me until next Thursday. The waiting the next week is going to be something - but should know by next week this time if I will come home with diamonds, so keep your fingers crossed.

Read where shoes go off rationing 1 Nov. and meats are expected to go off about 1 Jan - well I guess you have more things on your mind than those items.

Hope things at home and the office are better -

I do hope I can get home for Christmas this year - especially to see all of you and Grandmother.

Sorry to hear Pop has trouble sleeping again, when I get home I will give him a good playing over.

Remember me to Julie

Mum & Pop

Love

Stuart

WINS BRONZE STAR FOR HEROISM

Captain S. Sturgis Poorman, a 1937 graduate of Haverford College, has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service as commander of the 375th Medical Battalion in Belgium, France, and Holland.

Commissioned in May, 1942, the Haverford alumnus attended the Carlisle School for Field Doctors and originally was assigned to the 12th Armored Division at Camp Campbell, Kentucky. When he went overseas in Nov., 1944, he was attached to the 375th Medical Battalion with the 75th Infantry Division.

The division went into action on Christmas Day, 1944, against the advancing Germans in the Ardennes and later was transferred to the Ruhr pocket and then to Holland. Captain Poorman at present is in charge of the Breddestrasse Hospital at Bethel-Bielefeld, Germany.

6—Date of Beginning and Date of Ending of Each Period of Service Between December 7, 1941 and March 2, 1946 (Both Dates Inclusive) During Which Applicant Was In FOREIGN SERVICE.

NOVEMBER I5, I944 TO 6 DECEMBER 5, I945

12-22

Date of Beginning — Date of Ending